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THE "SOCIALIZED" RECITATION IN HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY

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WHY do we have recitations in history or in any subject, for that matter? The process of "recitation" is a school tradition which like all ingrained traditions, is difficult for us to appraise properly because we have had it with us always. Should we ask a frank student who could render articulate the vague idea of the majority of students, we might be told that the purpose of the recitation is to show how great is the teacher's knowledge, and how scant is the student's—a process more uniformly successful in the latter part of its aim than the former! Unfortunately this statement of the case is sometimes true; but, obviously, it is not fair to the earnest, thoughtful teacher who believes that her mission in the class room is the higher one of training the students to think; who would give them a sound motive for gathering facts to use as material for thought; and who would use the class recitation as an opportunity to throw enough light on her subject and inject enough life into it to give her students a desire to study it for themselves, and thus supply grist for their mental mills.

The average formal recitation does usually accomplish this aim, if the teacher who is conducting it has an understanding of student psychology, a mastery of her subject, a lively interest in it, and if she has the personality and power of expression which appeal to young people. It is not necessary to make any sweeping criticisms of the usual form of class recitation. There are too many able teachers who are doing vital, effective teaching by this means. Yet it is true that the average recitation which consists largely of questions by the teacher and answers by the students does not often accomplish for the students all that could be accomplished.

We must broaden out the aims of the recitation to include the wider aims of modern education in general. What are these larger aims of modern education? For the direct benefit of the individual student we desire to give him ample opportunity for self-expression. For his benefit as a member of a social group we plan to develop within him a sense of social responsibility, and an ability to co-operate with others in securing the common good.

How many of us who are teaching are able, in our daily recitations, carried on in the traditional formal

way, to reach out toward these broader aims of education? Not many, I venture to say. It is true that in our desire to give our students opportunity for self-expression, we do our best to stir up among them free, informal discussions of historical problems. But spontaneous discussions are, unfortunately, the occasional bright spots in our teaching career and not the high light of every-day experience. The expression of ideas in the class room is produced not by spontaneous activity on the part of the students, but by a sometimes painful process of extraction on the part of the persistent teacher. Why do spontaneous discussions come so seldom? It does not require profound insight to see that the students are restrained by the traditional feeling that the recitation is the teacher's business; that it is a formal process of which she is the main spring of action—the dynamo from which the energy comes to give life and momentum to the discussion. The teachers on their part accept this responsibility. Accustomed to being the more or less patient victims of long traditions they assume as one of the major problems of their profession, the struggle to overcome, what in moments of pessimism seems to them to be the innate apathy and unresponsiveness of the majority of students in the class room. Whether the teacher propel her students into discussion by force of personality, attract them into it by the magnetism of her own interest, drag them through it by sheer energy, or, perhaps too tragic even to mention, drive them through by fear of failure, the fundamental principle remains the same; the recitation is too largely the expression of the teacher herself and too little the result of the self-expressing activity of the students.

The formal recitation sets limits to our aims in other directions. It offers, not only too little incentive to self-expression on the part of the students, but also too little opportunity for the group-activity which involves exercise of social responsibility and development of a spirit of co-operation. Picture for a moment the typical history recitation. The students are seated in rows before the teacher; the teacher asks the questions, judges whether or not the answers are well given, and too often makes the criticisms herself. The students address the answers to her, look to her for correction, ask their questions of her, and in all things

depend on her judgment. Even when she refers an answer to them for criticism, they give their opinion, not to the student whose ideas they are estimating, but to the teacher. Occasionally only do they forget the presiding teacher sufficiently to address each other directly. She is not only the source of activity, but also the medium of communication between students. In this situation it is almost impossible for them to work together. Each student is a unit working with the teacher only, and rarely a member of a group. There is no feeling of social responsibility and no incentive to co-operate with others. Why should the student feel that he must help others or seek help from them when the teacher is there doing everything? Training in group activity can be given only in situations where the students have social responsibility resting upon them, and where they must co-operate to secure the common good.

The formal recitation, then, offers only limited opportunities to the students. How may the procedure be reorganized to do away with formality, to secure more freedom of expression from the students, to place more responsibility upon them, and to require more co-operative activity from them? Various methods of "socializing" the history recitation are possible. I shall attempt to outline one plan of procedure which I found useful in overcoming the old recitation habits of my high school students and myself.

One of my classes in American history gave me the inspiration and the opportunity to experiment with the idea of the "socialized" recitation. A group of students had formed a habit of assembling in my class room during the noon hour just before the recitation period. They were accustomed to draw up their chairs in a circle in a far corner of the room and there carry on an animated discussion of the lesson with each other. These informal preliminary sessions which went on day after day set me thinking vigorously of all that I had ever read about dynamic factors in education. There were these students, lively, interested, curious, attentive, asking each other questions, explaining points to each other, correcting mistaken ideas, and sometimes getting into lively debates. Was not this, after all, the ideal recitation? It was with regret that I beheld the transformation wrought by the sound of the class bell; spontaneous discussion ceased, chairs were pulled into line with military precision. Twenty-five or more students, suddenly changed from active to almost passive beings, sat up and looked at me. The question in their minds, I felt, was no longer, What does this subject mean? but rather, What is she, the teacher, going to do with it? The eloquent, expectant silence proclaimed to me that it was my move next.

One day when, eavesdropping from my desk, I had realized that the discussion had been even more interesting and profitable to the students than usual, I decided to forestall the disastrous effect of the bell. Just before it rang I interrupted the debaters to tell them that their conference was too interesting to be broken up; that they might continue it through the ensuing class period if they would admit all the members of the class and myself to their circle. Although they were somewhat surprised and puzzled at the request, they opened up their circle to the rest of us cordially enough. Their next reaction to the situation was to wait for the teacher to take charge. I disclaimed any intention of doing so. I wanted to be merely a listener unless they needed my help badly. The conference was theirs. They were to go on and do anything they thought necessary to clarify their own ideas on the lesson. Some of the leading spirits in the class caught the idea and resumed the discussion which went on in a somewhat halting fashion. It was different to dispel the deep-rooted feeling that where the teacher is, there must formality be also. The break with the tradition was too sudden to secure the perfect freedom among the students which had characterized their preliminary meeting. Something, however, was gained even in this first experiment. The ringing of the bell passed unnoticed and not all the momentum acquired in their spontaneous discussion was lost. Each student was encouraged to ask the others as many questions as he wished, either for the purpose of gaining information which he needed, or for the purpose of testing the others to see if they had learned as much as he had during the study period.

The hour's work left much to be desired in the way of organization, efficiency, and distribution of responsibility. Many poorly stated questions were asked; many inadequate answers were accepted; some important ideas were left floating in nebulous haze; and some time was wasted on non-essentials. I enjoined patience and self-control upon myself, however. My immediate aim was to keep the usual atmosphere of formality out, and to get the students to talk freely to each other without fear of correction from the teacher. I decided that training in sensible questioning and in adequate criticism of each other's statements must be postponed until some progress had been made toward this first aim. There were enough intelligent questions presented and enough fair and telling criticisms offered to give hope for the future.

Another difficulty loomed up large at once. The brighter and more energetic students took the lion's share of the opportunity to talk, leaving some of the

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The building will cost \$50,000. Plans are being made for a dormitory to accommodate some of the students.

Superintendent M. C. Terrell, of Alamance County, arranged for a special Pullman for the Alamance County teachers who attended the State Teachers' Assembly in Asheville. There were thirty-five teachers in the party. In Asheville they occupied the car, which was heated, lighted, and furnished with porter service.

Carl W. Seiler, of Mount Pleasant, was declared the winner in the high school declamation contest held at Trinity College on November 26th, and participated in by representatives from various high schools in the State. His declamation was entitled "The Confederate Dead." Giles O. Nicholson, of Burlington, with the declamation "America's Problems" was awarded second place. The appearance of Miss Margaret Bullitt, of Chapel Hill, in the finals, marks the first time that a girl has participated in the elimination contest in the ten years that the contest has been held. She made a good impression with her declamation entitled "Norman and Saxon."

TO TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS

THE annual meeting of the Association of Teachers of Secondary Mathematics will be held in Greensboro at the North Carolina College for Women on the fourth and fifth of February. Dr. J. W. Young, Chairman of the National Committee on Mathematical Requirements, will be the chief speaker. Teachers who have kept up with the work of this committee know the importance of its work and the necessity for a rearrangement of the work in mathematics in the schools. It is the purpose of this meeting to discuss such rearrangements with the view to their adoption in our secondary schools and at the same time to discuss the necessary changes in Freshman entrance conditions for the colleges.

Women teachers will be provided with board in the college dining room, and rooms can be obtained by writing Miss King before February first. The college cannot furnish rooms in the dormitories but can find them in the immediate vicinity. Teachers will be expected to pay for the use of rooms. Board in the dining room, however, will be free. Men are expected to make their own arrangements for board and lodging.

The program of the meeting will be sent to teachers early in January.—A. W. H.

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slower ones as inactive as before. My mind registered no serious protest against this fact at first. I recognized that born leaders must lead in any group, and I humbly acknowledged to myself that they were doing only what I had done these many weeks. Oligarchy may be a step toward democracy. It was something gained for the class that five or six students together shared the privilege which one teacher had monopolized so long. This problem, too, was postponed for later solution.

That the close of the hour came too quickly for the students was quite evident. There was no doubt in my mind that they had enjoyed the recitation, not merely because of the change and novelty of it, but because it had been their own work. Incomplete and disorganized as the development of the lesson had been in this system, it seemed worthy of further trial. The students had certainly done much more than the usual amount of thinking on the events which had been discussed, and had lived through these events with a more thorough comprehension of their reality.

In making the assignment for the next lesson I sought to secure some law and order for the students' discussion of it. I gave the assignment in the usual form—a topical outline of the important aspects of the subject, two or three "thought questions" requiring a survey of the whole, and a list of definite page-references to the text and library books from which they were getting their information. In addition to this general assignment to the whole class, I assigned each main topic in the outline to an individual student and explained to him that he would be responsible for leading the discussion of his part of the lesson. I suggested three methods of procedure in leading the discussion: he, himself, might give a full explanation of the topic and then ask other members of the class to criticize his explanation; he might state the facts in the case and then ask "thought questions," prepared by himself on these facts, and call on other members of the class to answer them; or, he might develop the subject entirely by means of questions put to the others. In whatever method he chose he would be responsible for securing from the others full criticism of his own statements, or adequate answers to the questions he had asked. Before closing the conference on his topic he must give the other members of the class an opportunity to ask him questions, either for the purpose of correcting errors made, or for the purpose of bringing out important points which he

had omitted, or to require him to explain more fully any point which he had failed to make clear. In order to encourage the use of questions I tried to explain that it required more clear thinking for him to organize a topic into intelligent questions than to explain it all himself. In order to save time in class and get each leader to think through his topic during the study hour, I asked that he write out his questions in his notebook before coming to class. To begin the training in sensible questioning I suggested that those questions beginning with Why, How, Where, What, Who, and sometimes When, were most effective in bringing out important ideas. I sought to make clear that good Why and How questions were the best evidence of a student's ability to think clearly. The remaining members of the class who were not asked to serve as leaders were assigned the responsibility of helping the leaders and criticising their work. Thorough preparation of their lesson was, of course, absolutely necessary if they were to do their part. The general two-fold purpose of the new form of recitation was explained to all; first, each was to clarify his own ideas and test himself to determine whether or not he understood fully the meaning of the lesson; second, he was to do his best to help others clarify their ideas by giving them any explanations which they seemed to need, and which he thought he could give, and by supplying any information on the subject he had gained in his study, which the others had not already given. Both purposes could be accomplished largely by means of questions.

This general plan of procedure and the purposes were restated at the opening of the next recitation—and many times thereafter—to keep them before the minds of the students. In placing upon them the responsibility for teaching as well as learning in class, I tried to show them why I was doing it. I explained to them that in working with them I had come to the conclusion that, whenever they had prepared their lessons well, they had, collectively, all the ideas on any subject which any one student needed. If each one would contribute his best to the common fund of ideas, all who had been on the alert to use the opportunity offered could come out of the recitation with a full understanding of the subject.

Naturally the students had much to learn in the use of their new freedom—and some things they learned but slowly. The old habit of addressing the teacher on all occasions persisted. Only by constant reminders that answers and explanations must be addressed to the student who had asked the question could overcome this habit. Then, too, there were the other difficulties which have already been pointed out. Gradually most of the students lost their self-consciousness

and assumed the right to free speech in the class room as their natural heritage. With this much gained, I could work more definitely on teaching effective forms of questioning. This I did chiefly by commending good questions and explaining to the class why they were good. As far as possible I avoided criticism of poorly stated questions in the class room. Adverse criticism in general was reserved for private conferences after class. The students themselves, of course, did much to secure good questions, for they would naturally force the restatement of any question which was not clear to them.

The monopoly of the recitation by the more able and self-reliant students was the next problem to be attacked. This, too, was in part overcome naturally, for many weak and timid students found it easier to express themselves to other students than to recite to the teacher. In part it had to be overcome by private conferences with the natural leaders who were urged to direct more of their questions to the less active students and thus help them to join in the discussion. Another serious difficulty, the waste of time on minor points, was often attacked by the students themselves as they began to realize that they would not get through the lesson if they dwelt too long on non-essentials. If their own common sense failed to come to the rescue, I usually interfered to suggest to the leader that he would do well to bring the class back to the main points of his subject. Other difficulties arose to be solved. Working together we tried to overcome them. As in all forms of recitation, many difficulties were never permanently removed.

In the course of time changes in the method of conducting the class and in giving assignments suggested themselves as occasions demanded and subject matter varied. I soon stopped the practice of appointing the leader in advance. Instead I asked each member of the class to be prepared to lead the discussion of any topic in the lesson. This insured a more general interest and better preparation of the whole lesson.

On the whole the results of the "socialized" recitation, I felt, justified me in adopting it as the regular form of procedure in all of my history classes. Only in occasional "development" lessons and general review lessons did I resume a semblance of the former benevolent despotism in the high school class room.

In the matter of discipline only one point was stressed. I found that, at first, it was frequently necessary to remind the students that they must listen courteously to each other and never interrupt a speaker who was addressing the class, unless they felt reasonably sure that he was needlessly wasting their time. A courteous form of interruption was then justified. In general, there were no restriction on their freedom

as long as they were attending to the business of the day and observing the rules of ordinary courtesy and good taste.

What was the teacher's part in the "socialized" recitation? Planning the work, stating the larger problems for the class to work out, and finding the best sources of information, remained her chief duty. Since she had transferred the larger part of the burden of recitation to the students it was, more than ever, necessary for her to plan her assignments with utmost care. Emphasis on essentials and elimination of non-essentials which she had formerly accomplished in the recitation must now be planned in the assignment of the lessons. In the class room she had to be ever on the alert, when the necessity arose, to guide, direct, and check without making the students feel that she was taking the responsibility away from them. In points of controversy she was the court of final appeal, unless the students had at hand written authorities to which they could refer. Whenever it was expedient she suggested that they consult their books on doubtful points rather than depend on her to tell them.

I am not relating this experience because it represents any new, wonder-working method of teaching. I am offering it as a suggestion to high school teachers in history who are struggling, as I was, to give the students worthy motives for thorough, thoughtful work. The change in method brought good results but wrought no astounding miracles with average students. No external process can ever work miracles; the human factor represented by teacher and student is too overwhelmingly important. Our "socialized" recitations were not always the ideal, spontaneous discussions motivated by the students' eager desire for knowledge, or their altruistic impulse to teach each other! These boys and girls were normal, average young people whose curve of zeal and industry would rise and fall in the usual high school manner. I found, however, that the change in method increased their interest and pleasure in their work. To meet their new responsibilities they were forced to study more thoroughly, to do more independent thinking, and to organize their ideas more carefully. In this plan, too, they expressed their own reactions to problems more sincerely, and discussed with greater freedom the things which interested them. On the whole I felt that we were making real progress toward giving the students better opportunity to express themselves, to exercise social responsibility, and to develop the spirit and habit of co-operation in their high school work, and thus we were approaching nearer the goal of modern education.

ACCREDITED SCHOOLS

AT the annual meeting of the High School Commission of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools held at Chattanooga, Tennessee, November 30—December 3, forty-one North Carolina High Schools were accredited for the current year. A complete list of the North Carolina schools now accredited by the Commission follows:

LOCATION AND NAME OF SCHOOL

Asheville:	Lake Junaluska:
Asheville School	Snyder Outdoor School for Boys
Bingham Military School	
City High School	Laurinburg:
Normal and Collegiate Institute	High School
St. Genevieve's Academy	Lenoir:
Grove Park School	High School
Burlington:	Marion:
High School	High School
Chapel Hill:	Mars Hill:
High School	Mars Hill College
Canton:	Oak Ridge:
High School	Oak Ridge Institute
Charlotte:	Raleigh:
High School	High School
Durham:	Reidsville:
High School	High School
Trinity Park School	Roanoke Rapids:
Edenton:	High School
High School	Rockingham:
Elizabeth City:	High School
High School	Scotland Neck:
Gastonia:	High School
High School	Shelby:
Greensboro:	High School
High School	Smithfield:
Greenville:	High School
High School	Tarboro:
Hendersonville:	High School
High School	West Durham:
Fassifern	High School
Blue Ridge School for Boys	Wilmington:
High Point:	High School
High School	Wilson:
Kinston:	High School
High School	Winston-Salem:
	High School
	Salem Academy

Several important and interesting resolutions in regard to the accrediting of schools and other aspects of secondary education were passed at this meeting. An account of these resolutions will appear in full in a forthcoming number of the JOURNAL.

The members of the High School Commission from North Carolina for the year ending December, 1920, were Professor N. W. Walker, University of North Carolina; Professor R. L. Flowers, Trinity College; and Superintendent E. D. Pusey, of the Durham City Schools.